

27
The Altar on the Threshing-floor.

A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED IN THE

First Eng. Evan. Lutheran Church,

PITTSBURGH, PA.

On Thanksgiving Day, Nov. 26, 1857.

BY

CHARLES P. KRAUTH.

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MDCCCLVII.

PITTSBURGH, November 27, 1857.

REV. C. P. KRAUTH :

Dear Sir —

Having heard with great pleasure your Discourse delivered on Thanksgiving Day, and feeling assured that a more extended consideration of its teachings would be peculiarly desirable at the present time, we would respectfully solicit, on behalf of the Congregation, a copy for publication.

Very Respectfully, Yours,

EDWARD RAHM,	GEO. WEYMAN,
GEO. BLACK,	J. REAMER,
THOMAS PHILLIPS,	C. HANSON LOVE,
SAM'L. A. LONG,	THOS. H. LANE.

PITTSBURGH, December 2, 1857.

MESSRS. EDWARD RAHM, GEO. WEYMAN, and others :

Gentlemen —

The Sermon which you ask for publication, I place at your disposal, in the sincere trust that, by the blessing of Him who can make the humblest efforts useful, it may not be wholly without that availability for practical good, which you are kind enough to believe it possesses.

Believe me, very truly and gratefully, Yours,

CHAS. P. KRAUTH.



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DISCOURSE.

“AND DAVID BUILT THERE AN ALTAR UNTO THE LORD, AND OFFERED BURNT-OFFERINGS AND PEACE-OFFERINGS. SO THE LORD WAS ENTREATED FOR THE LAND, AND THE PLAGUE WAS STAYED FROM ISRAEL.”

2 Samuel 24:25.

It is impossible, Beloved, entirely to shake from our hearts the feeling that there are aspects in the condition of our country which would seem to make it natural that we should sanctify this day to mourning, rather than to thanksgiving; that the people who have been summoned to a high festival of praise, should be called to the rending of their hearts, and that “the ministers of the LORD should weep between the porch and the altar.”

A part of the Churches of this land have, in fact, not inappropriately prepared themselves, as it were, for the thanksgiving of this day, by consecrating a day of the past week to fasting and humiliation. Nor is it unmeet that we should aim at the same end, and attempt to do justice to our conflicting emotions, by combining, on the same day, the thoughts suggested on the one side by the blessings, on the other by the sufferings, of our land—to harmonize them with the object of the day, by finding

cause of thanksgiving in both. Nor is this a difficult task, for blessing and suffering, in the divine language, are often synonyms. Though joys seem as buds, and griefs as thorns, it is one and the same vital energy of love which puts them both forth on the growth of human life—the roses to breathe sweetness amid the thorns, and the thorns to give security to the roses—both springing from the same soil, and borne upon the same root.

For what is true of individual chastisements, is equally true of the visitations of nations. We may, as a people, like David at the altar on the threshing-floor of Araunah, fitly offer together the penitential confession of sins, which was associated with burnt-offerings, and the thanksgiving, which was attended by the peace-offerings. The sacrifices of David were offered while the heart of the whole nation was palpitating with the horrors of the divine judgment. Yet David felt that there was cause of thanksgiving in the mercy that tempered the stroke and mingled itself with it. The altar was reared on the threshing-floor, as if God, who “plays in history,” would, by the very locality, suggest that separation of the chaff from the wheat, which is the object of His judgments, and the token of His mercy. There, with the “burnt-offerings” of atonement, the penitent king presented the “peace-offerings” of praise, the recognitions of the divine forbearance, and the expressions of the trust that the scourge would be wholly taken away, and blessing again fill the land. And thus, Beloved, though we feel the sins of our nation, and mourn this day over its calamities, and implore mercy for the sake of Him whose perfect offering has made needless all atoning sacrifice; yet when we think how light is the stroke,

where so heavy a one was deserved, and call to mind the amazing mercies blended with it, “by Him let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.”

It is the love that chastens, not the vengeance that repays, that has met us in the path of our national guilt and folly. Let us contemplate, then, as the theme of this day: A SMITTEN PEOPLE UNITING IN THANKSGIVING FOR THE LIGHTNESS OF THE JUDGMENT, AND THE MERCY THAT MITIGATES IT.

The chastening hand of God is undeniably on our land. A vast commercial crisis has been precipitated on the nation. In the midst of her busy life, she seemed to be seized with the shiver of a financial death. Bankruptcy has come forth like the vapor from the vessel of the Arabian fisherman, first wavering, and then assuming the shape of a giant. Credit has been stricken down, and confidence has been paralyzed. The nakedness of things most sacredly covered, has been revealed. The secret frauds of years have been dragged forth to the hissings and hootings of the world. Fortunes have vanished. The Princes of the Realm of Trade have become beggars, or have saved themselves from beggary by villainy; the widow's heart has been wrung by the ruin that has fallen on her home, and orphans have been reduced to utter dependence, yet know not on whom to depend. Human industry has been suppressed; the loom is silent; the anvil ceases to ring; the ponderous bellows of the forge disturb not the cold ashes; the dark but cheerful column which rose from the glass-house and foundry, the manufactory and the rolling-mill, and which to the work-

man seemed as his pillar of cloud by day, and of fire by night, is seen no more; the nimble fingers of the seamstress are idle: many that never knew a care, are now pressed with want; and thousands on whom to-morrow once flung no shadow, are now in deep disquietude about to-day. Agrarianism strives to lift its snaky head; the demagogue is busy in seeking to turn the sufferings of men to his selfish account. Man closes his heart against his fellow-man, and religion and beneficence are checked in all their plans. Honesty hardly can retain its self-consciousness amid the confusion and complications of an emergency which has made it impossible for many of the most sagacious and provident to meet their obligations; an emergency which has reduced to the same apparent level, the dishonest man who will not pay, and the man of integrity who cannot pay. To thousands who are plunged into hopeless embarrassment, it seems as though, at the mid-noon of our country's prosperity, her sun, not as by eclipse, nor by sudden descent to the horizon, but as if it sunk away into the very zenith, sheds no more the beams of its full glory, but suffuses all things with the pallor of a "darkness visible."

Yet, with all these facts before us, we affirm that we have cause of thanksgiving in this: that our national sufferings are so much less than we merit by the greatness of our sins. And in this proposition we imply three affirmations: first, that our land has great sins; secondly, that her afflictions are the divine chastenings of her sins; and thirdly, that

"His strokes are fewer than our crimes,
And lighter than our guilt."

No thoughtful man can deny that we have great national sins. It is true, not all the sins *in* a nation are properly the sins *of* a nation. A nation can be charged with the sins of her sons, only so far as she fosters the spirit of those sins, or is indolent or indiscreet in her efforts to arrest them. To strike at national sins requires something more than clumsy blows, however well meant, and vigorously given, at whatever may not square with an Utopian imagination, which builds castles of theory on foundations of fog. No man is competent even to define, still less to correct national sins, who is unable or unwilling to allow for the imperfections which, in the nature of things, must mar the noblest institutions framed or administered by man. Nor must the sin in a twig or branch of the national tree be confounded with the sin in the sap, which would vitalize and reproduce all the mischief which might be lopped off in the brief agony of national pruning. Beneath all outward manifestations of evil, there lies in men and nations a spirit from which it unfolds itself. The shape of sin is but the incarnation of evil, as the body is the incarnation of the soul. To understand national sin, we must see its soul, the "original sin" which generates its sins of purpose and of act. In vain will it be to look on the outward appearance, to paint with the hues of health the wan cheek of the consumptive, to efface the tokens of disease, and imagine the work is done. We must imitate the divine plan, and address ourselves to the correction of the life principle of evil, strive to discern and eradicate the disease itself, even as JEHOVAH creates a new heart, and the new heart creates the new man; even as He gives health, and health diffuses its own glow.

It requires no long or minute observation to be satisfied that every nation has its distinguishing spirit, from whose direction or misdirection arise its virtues or vices. Often, indeed, its vices spring from a perversion of the tendencies which, rightly directed, would make a nation glorious; "some soul of goodness" is to be distilled even out of its "things evil." If we should designate that peculiarity of our nation which, in its proper working and under due restraints, is the source of her energy, her independence and her progress, and which yet, in its exaggeration and abuse, may become the source of ruinous evils, and of ruin, we would say, it is her spirit of self-reliance. True self-reliance is, indeed, a noble trait, when it rests on the divine promise, and feels strong in itself, because God, its refuge, is strong. Its feet are beautiful upon the mountains, because it is on the pathway marked out by JEHOVAH it is fearlessly treading. A generous confidence in her own institutions, and in her own strength; a noble self-respect, which will not lower itself to so base a thing as crime, however tempting may be the lure—the movement of an ardent heart, which throbs for something higher, better and greater—these are the life and glory of a young state,

—"a spirit in the world

That causes all the ebbs and flows of nations,
Keeps mankind sweet by actions."

But there is a natural result, and in the present condition of human nature, if unrestrained, an almost inevitable result of continued prosperity, which may turn the impulses of the national heart, originally so generous and exalting, into sources of crime and destruction. Into this condition our nation appears not only to have entered,

but to have advanced to an alarming degree. We are verging fast toward a reckless and arrogant trust in ourselves; a sentiment, practically, that we are the source of our own blessings, that we will prosper at any rate, whether God favor us or not. This feeling tends to an atheistical presumption, a rushing toward destiny, in which conscience and humanity are trampled beneath the feet. Closely does our national sin associate itself with the occasion of the offerings of David at the altar on the threshing-floor.

The visitation of God on the people, which led to those sacrifices, directs the mind to the question often raised, why national sins, whose overt forms are generally most palpably displayed by the rulers, are yet so frequently scourged in ways which affect directly only the subjects of the state. It is the magistrates who seem to sin, and the people bear the judgments. This Book of books, in which there is a picture of all human life, so far as it is connected with the invisible kingdom of God, gives to the mystery a divine solution. It seems, indeed, at first view, as if all the sin was David's, and all the suffering, the people's. But the crime of David was but an indulgence in the prevalent spirit of his nation—a political self-conceit, a reliance upon human might, a practical pushing of JEHOVAH from his seat as the sovereign disposer of events, and the necessary source of all civil prosperity. "He was scourged through his people, not in his own person, because he was merely the official embodiment of their spirit. "The anger of the LORD," we are told, "was kindled against Israel, and He moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah." The sin was

already in the hearts of the people, and required correction; but if it had not been suffered to display itself in some outward form, the object of any chastening sent would not have been clearly seen. The particular offense, then, of numbering Israel, was not the *cause*, but only the *occasion*, of the awful visitation. The spirit of boastfulness in Israel, the restless desire to know how much they were increasing in numbers, had doubtless been fostered by the brilliant temporal career which had been opened before them by their illustrious king. The Almighty had promised to make them as the stars of heaven, and as the sands of the sea-shore, for multitude; but they were not willing to bide His time, and by humility and faith secure the blessing. They were sinfully eager to have evidence that they were about becoming all they aspired to be. JEHOVAH permitted this spirit to display itself in an overt form in David, and then visited their sin in judgment. Had He smitten sooner, the aim and the rectitude of His dealing would have been less clear; had He delayed longer, the people would have been more thoroughly pervaded with the latent evil, and severer inquisition would have been necessary to remove it. In mercy, therefore, GOD permitted the peccant humors of the state to come to a head in the person of the king they idolized—that very king, the renown of whose arms, and the ability of whose administration, had nourished their dangerous self-reliance.

Like Israel, in the pride “that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh its arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD;” like Israel, in her hazardous approach to the curse which follows that pride, is our land. Pride is the high-

est peril of great natures, and great nations. We have abused the very mercies of heaven to feed ours. God has stretched forth his hand as signally in redeeming us from bondage, as he stretched it forth to Israel; His guidance has been as marvelous; the miracles of His mercy as manifold; His gifts more glorious; our vocation hardly less sublime: "He hath not dealt so with any nation." But does our nation meekly kneel, and press to her lips and her heart, the hand that has made her great and happy? Does she act as though she, above all nations, had reason to rest humbly, thankfully, trustingly, on the providence of God? Does she weigh the awful responsibility of her distinguished position and privileges? Does she show no disposition to permit herself to be rapt into a bewildering dream, a delirium of ambitious self-conceit? My brethren, we cannot conceal the fact that here lies the most dangerous tendency of our land. Our nation nurses the feeling, and is hardly ashamed to confess it, that she is borne on by a kind of happy fatality, which neither she nor others can resist. Too often, instead of guiding herself by light from the eternal Throne, the light reflected from the eternal Word, she seems to look to a "star of destiny,"—not the star which guided wise men to the Prince of peace, but to that meteoric light which led the mighty murderers of mankind, that baleful glory which dazzled them into a career, the record of the crimes and sorrows of which proves that no falsehood, however gross, can be safely left to the self-annihilating power of its own absurdity, that no trust, however weak in itself, may not assume a deadly power, when it can be used by men as a pretext for doing what they already desire.

It is, indeed, easy to impress upon the mind of a nation a thought which so dignifies our nature as this, that we are carrying out the plans of God. To regard themselves as co-workers with the Omnipotent, is flattering to men, and to lead them to feel this, is consequently easy; but to make them realize the fearful accountability which is connected with their mission, the responsibility which attends men, either as the ministers of the benevolence or of the vengeance of God—this is hard, because it checks the presumption of man, sweeps to the earth his pride, and holds his depravity in rein. Men do not love to be told that they are but instruments, whose course a will above their own has the absolute right of determining; that they, without any reservation whatever, are the dependent subjects of a King, through whom alone that success is possible which they imagine they control, and to whom alone its glory is due. Like Israel's king, we desire to number Israel. In my reign, by my wisdom, by my skill in battle, and my judgment in council, and my energy in execution, Israel has flourished. Let the inhabitants of the land be numbered, let us see what number of men we can send forth to battle, that we may exult among ourselves, and that others may wonder, and envy, and fear. Nothing can arrest our progress toward the first place among the nations, and in our pathway we will yet trample in the dust those who have laughed us to scorn. Such was the spirit of David and his people, and such is the spirit of our nation.

Detached from a heart-felt reliance upon God, as by its very nature it tends to be, and unchecked even by the healthy caution of self-love, as it soon becomes, there is no madness of scheme, no wickedness of policy,

no atrocity in action, to which this unhallowed ambition, this fatalistic inflation, will not furnish a plea. To every appeal to national honor, to public integrity, to common morality, when they come in the way of its purposes, the cool reply will be:

“Who can turn the stream of destiny,
Or break the chain of strong necessity,
Which fast is tied to Jove’s eternal throne?”

When Atheism assumes the robes of Religion; when men call their immoral plottings, plans of providence, and give the name of divine sovereignty to the brutishness of human license; when the most hallowed names are played off against the most hallowed things; when the Devil, in terms of Scripture, tempts a nation to worship him; when the designing pour into the golden vessels they have stolen from the “temple of the house of God,” the poisonous draught, at the drunken banquet of national conceit; when the thoughtless and indolent, tricked by the “great swelling words of vanity,” seem to believe that by some legerdemain of language, evil has actually become good, and darkness light, and bitter sweet—then is it time for the hearts of the good to grow sick with fear.

That such a spirit does prevail in our nation, is shown in the increasing disposition to consider *success* the standard and test of excellence. At no time, and in no place, has it been more true than in our land, that “men will praise thee when thou doest well to thyself.” When it is said: “Israel is an empty vine—he bringeth forth fruit unto himself,” there is no people to whom the divine premise and conclusion could seem less in harmony than to ours.

No matter how low the department of human exertion, or how base the expedients by which wealth may have been won; no matter how pure and self-sacrificing the principles on which earthly good may have been renounced, is it not true, that in our land, with all its boast of equality, men are deemed worthy of honor merely for being rich, and are despised simply for being poor? "Put money in thy purse—make all the money thou canst," is a watchword of our land. Our pride, which elsewhere seems so towering, grovels here; that same pride which had risen up like to the Archangel ruined, with some of his majesty of movement, and some of his grandeur of form, here shows itself in reptile shape like that to which he sunk at the ear of Eve.

Impelled by the greediness of wealth, men select occupations for themselves and their children, not with reference to the highest intellectual and moral interests of mankind, but with exclusive regard to their availability for gain. There is a sordid and narrow calculation at work everywhere. The genuine sense of the necessity of national education, bears no real proportion to our wants, because it is repressed by the avarice of the land. The standard of education throughout almost all our country is very low; in some parts of it, the ignorance is gross; and there is a shameful reluctance to sustain the institutions of learning, from the highest to the humblest. It is a fact which should make our cheeks burn with shame, that our land is not first—it is not second, among the nations of the earth, in the diffusion of popular education.

To the extent to which our nation, instead of being fast anchored in eternal principles, commits herself to the

shifting gusts of willfulness, she puts herself at the mercy of every excitement of the hour; for vanity, the most restless of passions, keeps all the others in unrest. With Athenian indefatigability, we spend the time which can be spared from money-making, "in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing." It is now the greatness, and then the smallness, of somebody, which draws out our enthusiasm. Some great General runs the gauntlet between the shaking hands and applauding mouths of the people, and drops dead at the end of the course; and then another military chieftain, remarkable for his glorious defeats, puts the ocean between himself and the scenes of his renown, shakes the feather in his hat in the face of the nation, (which style of hat and feather immediately becomes the rage,) and finds enough show of enthusiasm to make him dream for a while that we will repair all the losses of his land; not knowing, poor man, that all the pomp and circumstance of the reception were designed solely for the amusement of the good citizens, who just then needed a novelty. Then the interest shifts, perhaps for three days, to some enormous Convention, a collection of bubbles on the stream of the times, imagining that the river on which they float is being pulled along by them. Now we are all excitement about a great Author—then about a great Actor—or some Danseuse of distinguished impudence; now it is a Swedish Nightingale, and then a Hatter, who advertises himself and his wares by giving some hundreds of dollars to hear her sing. Murders, and frightful accidents, and diabolical crimes, are the mere titillations of a languid appetite. Excitement we want, and excitement we will have. Society, and Church, and

State, must tax all their ingenuity to furnish some new melodrama for the satiated sight-seers. When anybody tries to arrest the notice of our people, and the kind attention they may for a moment vouchsafe him, is repaid neither by his eating fire, nor by swallowing a sword, nor by going through any sort of jugglery whatsoever, we consider ourselves injured individuals, and hiss him heartily. Live Vanity Fair! what comes next? is the cry of our people. Often, under the conflicting currents of excitement, our country would justify the application of one of Milton's happiest phrases; it becomes "a windy sea of land."

On the young, our hope, the spirit of reckless self-confidence operates powerfully for evil. From its influence, they become unwilling to bear even the most wholesome and necessary restraint. From our great national sentiment, that man is capable of self-government, they easily jump to a corollary very flattering to their self-complacency and wishes—that boys are capable of self-government. Hence there is among many young Americans an exhibition of insubordination. They are, as young men, beyond the reach of restraint, because they were never held in check as boys. This spirit of self-confidence tends, furthermore, to bring into the minds of the generation just coming into active life, a contempt or neglect of the practical means necessary to the attainment of the very ends at which, impelled by the national love of money, they would aim. Though no nation toils like ours, no nation can furnish more finished specimens of covetous laziness; of passions that would, combined with hands that will not; of men that would eat without working,

and would gather where they have not strawed. This neglect of means exhibits itself widely in another form in the nation. The humble worker knows that he must toil if he would thrive; the master workman, perverted by the consciousness of his own ability, may become careless and dissipated. Talent has been ruined by a sense of its own powers, has done nothing, because it felt it could do everything; and the patient drudge has carried away the prize while the indolent genius was dreaming of it. Thus the very abundance of our nation's resources obscures her sense of the necessary connection between the end and the means. She does not see as clearly as she might, if she were less favored, that if we would have a glorious posterity, we must be in earnest in training our children, that they may, in the strength of God, fulfill their high destination; that if we would have the evils of society redressed, we must earnestly labor for the suppression of every wrong; that if our land is to be bright and happy, we must see that her counsels are directed by the divine law, and her government administered by pure hands. We dare not leave the spirit of our nation to right itself, for it is a spirit which makes it impatient of that which would rectify its evils. It is a spirit which lays our nation open to the temptation of looking, both in measures and in men, for that which will contribute to our vain-glorying, rather than for that which will promote our highest good. Our nation loves to be flattered, and displays a childish passion for the glitter of tinsel, and the sound of titles. By a skillful touching of the proper strings, she may be hurried through wild excitement to results of which she never dreamed, results for which she cannot account,

though they are the work of her own hands. Popular sentiment in our land is so mighty, that when it is perverted its tyranny is fearful. When our nation is reluctant to hear the truth, though the necessity of speaking it be imperative, where will you find men ready to become the martyrs of a free utterance? "It is a bold mouse," says a quaint old proverb, "who will build his nest in the cat's ear;" but he is no bolder than the mouse who would whisper some disagreeable truth into it. Many of our modern prophets feel this. The old prophets denounced iniquity where it was practiced. They did not go to Dan to rouse the people to a wholesome conscience about the iniquities of Beersheba: Nathan did not traverse the lanes of the Holy City to tell everybody but David, that David was the man; but now, it is to Jerusalem you must go to learn that no good thing can come out of Nazareth: the rabbis of Judea are learned in proof that "no prophet ariseth out of Galilee;" and the physicians protest, with pathetic vehemence, against having their skill tested by their ability to heal themselves. Oh, my brethren, the spirit of our land requires that the truth which breaks our national prejudices should be wielded as with the sweep of sledges of iron—not flourished in the air, but descending upon the very rock to be broken; that the divine Word, which is as a fire, should enter the inmost heart of our nation, either to purge it at once of its follies, or to burn till we can endure it no longer. The gambler in politics has us at the mercy of his arts; the violent and headstrong domineer at will. The spirit of the mob, of repudiation, of wanton assault on the rights of others, is rife; a spirit which destroys the moral sense of a nation,

makes convenience their law, saps all principles of integrity, and puts gigantic power into the hands of the worst men. The nation that cherishes this spirit, must die. If godless pride, and overweening vanity, be the winds that drive the ship of state, no pilotage can save her from being dashed on the breakers of utter ruin.

Utter ruin—for that nations have sins, is not more sure than that God visits national sins with national punishments. The stroke of JEHOVAH, which led to the erection of the altar on the threshing-floor, was one which fell upon a people for its sins. The victims of the pestilence died, not that they were worse than others, but as the representatives of the whole nation, through whom it was scourged. The Galileans, whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices, were not sinners above all the Galileans; the eighteen on whom the Tower of Siloam fell, were not sinners above all that dwelt in Jerusalem: the justice which took them, might have taken the rest—but mercy spared them; but as it spared, whispered, “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”

All the annals of our race confirm the Biblical teaching, that nations, as such, are visited with the chastenings of God. Many epitomes of universal history have been written, but the records of all the dead nations were perfectly epitomized long ago in a single sentence of the prophet: “The nation and kingdom that will not serve Thee, shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted.”

There are times in the life of a people when all hearts bleed with “wounds immedicable;” when a whole land becomes a Bethlehem, filled with the weepings of Rachels

who refuse to be comforted for their children. There are times when, as in Nineveh, the prince and the beggar are alike in sackcloth and ashes; there are times when the hand upon the wall traces its awful characters so vividly, that the atheistical revelers themselves, in the midst of their banquet, are frozen by fear into ghastly muteness. God smites the nations. Reverently would we speak of His judgments, for they are "a great deep." We would not put forth our hand to unveil His secret counsels. But as we would not assume the revelation of what He hides, neither dare we try to hide what He reveals; and it is His declaration, that as with individuals, so with nations, He "will recompense them according to their deeds, and according to the work of their own hands."

This truth is so palpable, that the heathen themselves have recognized it. But the sacred Narrative, which teaches us why the altar was erected on the threshing-floor, opens to our view a truth to which man, unassisted, could not have attained. That truth is, that even when a nation is to be chastened, God does not always send upon it the full measure of deserved punishment, but mingles mercy with judgment. When the nation was to be smitten, David was permitted to choose one of three forms of affliction: famine, war, and pestilence. In famine, their only earthly hope would have been in the charity of the surrounding nations, the charity of enemies; in war, they would have been left to the hate of those nations. To choose between either of those and pestilence, presented a frightful alternative, so that David was in a great strait; but with a heart melting already under the divine lesson, he nobly judged: "Let us fall

now into the hand of the LORD, for His mercies are great; and let me not fall into the hand of man."

We have seen that we are like Israel, in our sin; but far beyond Israel have we been dealt with in mercy, in the choice which our Father has made among the judgments which he might in righteousness have inflicted upon us. If the sending of a pestilence, instead of war or famine, was mercy, how shall we be thankful enough, that when war, or famine, or pestilence, would not have been too sore a scourge for our sins, peace, plenty and health are within our borders. We labor, indeed, under a severe financial pressure, but a mere disturbance of the relations of trade, is, under the worst circumstances, absolutely insignificant when compared with the lightest of the evils offered to the choice of Israel; but ours actually comes with every conceivable mitigation.

"SHALL SEVEN YEARS OF FAMINE," said the prophet, "COME UNTO THEE IN THY LAND?" Compare our financial depression with famine, as a national scourge. In famine, a whole nation, in all its members, feels the pangs of want, which but a few, at most, will now suffer. It is true, that deep as is the interest of the public in the needs of the unemployed, cases of destitution and starvation may occur, by which our souls will be thrilled; but what is the distress in which the individual sufferers can be counted, compared with one in which the victims are numberless? Now, at every report of suffering, there will be eager hands to supply the needed food. In famine, none can supply the wants of others; the simple instinct of self-preservation shuts up the heart; men pine away in silent misery, or, to still the furious cravings of hunger, resort

to means whose bare recital is harrowing. The child weeps for food, and understands not why it is not given, but grows silent at the terrible light, such as it never before had seen, in its mother's eyes.—Think of unhappy Ireland, but a few years ago, when the groans of her woe-worn children of famine wrung our inmost hearts, though an ocean rolled between us and their despairing cry; remember, that at this hour our land groans beneath the weight of plenty, and say, may we not present peace-offerings, with the burnt-offerings, at the altar on the threshing-floor—may we not, in the very character of our visitation, find reason for thanksgiving this day?

“OR WILT THOU,” continued the seer, “FLEE THREE MONTHS BEFORE THINE ENEMIES, WHILE THEY PURSUE THEE?” To describe the horrors of war, would be to describe all horrors that man can endure, for all horrors follow in its train. Take from the annals of our own era a leaf of the history of a great nation, a leaf, now indeed, familiar even to triteness, yet suggesting itself as the best illustration we can offer here; first, because that nation, in its high self-esteem, its proud trust in its own resources, its thirst for glory, its blindness to right in the path of its ambition, presents the matured form to which our own people is tending; and secondly, because the employment of war as the scourge of God upon it, is made more striking by the fact that war was the chosen instrument of its ambition, even as there are thousands of restless hearts longing to make war the instrument of ours. Trace the acts of the mighty drama of French history, at the close of the last century and the beginning of this, to learn what war, whether unsuccessful

or successful, is, as a scourge of nations. The earliest acts of that drama closed with the end of the Revolution, in which they had guillotined their monarch, and enthroned in his place the Mob, the tyrant with many heads but with no heart; had renounced their God; had swollen the streams with the blood, and choked their channels with the corpses, of murdered men; had overthrown everything, and established nothing.—Then came an act in which the scene shifts tumultuously.

“Through storm and darkness yawns the rending ground,
And the gulf is thick with phantoms.”

From that gulf comes forth a form, waving for a moment a wand, by whose power the elements, hitherto warring with and destroying one another, are marshaled, and in harmony pour themselves resistlessly whithersoever he will. Combining two characters in the vision of Daniel, he pushes westward, and northward, and southward, “and touched not the ground,” so swift were the bounds which he made toward universal conquest. All Europe was swept by the armies of France, and nations yet weep when they point to the spots still rank with verdure springing from the blood of their sons, the precious blood which was shed in vain. One vast fragment lay as the only barrier between France and the control of the world. On that barrier of rock she flung her hosts.—The act is closing with the roll of the drum, and the roar of artillery; the bursting of flame, the tramp of infantry, and the thunder of cavalry. The eagles which gather to the prey, now darken, and then, with the blaze of their golden wings, lighten the dull

grey sky of Russia, as the banners flap and wave in the auspicious winds which lure them onward. Moscow falls, and the Emperor there awaits the appeal, from the Czar, for pity. Oh, the glory of war! How the wild burst of joy from the triumphant chivalry of France tells their irrepressible exultation. But, hark! a dull sound like the beating of a conflagration seems to mingle with the shouts of the soldiers, and on the curtain, as it swiftly falls, there plays a lurid light, as if behind it the scenes themselves were in flames.

But the light ceases to flicker on it. It rises; but the whole pageant has melted away. A shroud of deadly snow glistens in the cold sun. That shroud covers the glory of France. It hides the forms of two hundred and fifty-seven thousand of her sons, slain in battle or by the fiercer hand of cold and famine. All the sorrows she had inflicted, were destined to return into her own bosom. All the struggles that followed, only made her downfall more terrific. She was not only driven within her own borders, but the very sanctuary of her pride, her Capital, was desecrated by the feet of the nations on whom she had once trodden. At Waterloo, her dream of glory utterly vanished. Impoverished, humiliated, bleeding at every pore, the nation more eager of glory and more alive to dishonor than any that earth ever saw, lifted her hands to her deriding foes and wept, half because of the burning shame of her debasement, and half for the mercy which was her only hope. To her mighty leader, all that remained, after the fearful sacrifices which he had so often demanded, and which had been so freely made, was a tomb within "a sea-girt rock;" a tomb to which the hands of foemen committed him; a tomb over which not

one of all whom he had lifted to glory, no hero of his battles, nor brother, sister, wife or child, bent to weep—his only dirge,

“ the sea-bird’s cry,
The mournful murmur of the surge,
The cloud’s deep voice, the wind’s low sigh.”

And France, as the recompense of what she did and endured, has now his remains and his memory. Over the coffin that holds those remains, the standards of Austerlitz cast their shadows; upon it lies the imperial crown; and by its side the sword with which he won and for a little while upheld the glittering ruin of his renown. One part of the price which France had paid into the hand of God for sharing his guilty ambition, was told in the National Assembly by Lafayette:—“The bones of our brothers and of our children, everywhere attest our fidelity to him,—amid the sands of Africa, on the shores of the Guadalquivir and of the Tagus, on the banks of the Vistula, and in the frozen deserts of Muscovy. THREE MILLIONS of Frenchmen have perished for one man.”

With every one of these millions, what joys and hopes went to the dust, what hearts were broken, what homes made desolate. The Conscription, even through the years of the triumphs of France, brooded over her households as a vulture hangs above a fold of lambs, and she endured all the miseries of the conqueror, which nothing can surpass except the miseries of the conquered. The ebbing of her glory brought back upon her all that its flood-tide had driven upon the shores she had desolated: the defacing of the fairest works of nature and of art—the letting loose the infernal passions of the vilest men—the unchain-

ing of lust and murder to glut themselves at will; the earth lay neglected—the plow-share rusted in the furrow, and was hidden by the weeds—the vines were unpruned—the hedges overgrown—the villages in ashes—the cattle wantonly butchered, lying about the fields, loaded the air with noisome malaria. All these, and a thousand more horrors, were but the attendants of the great central scenes in which France paid in blood for all the blood she had shed; till at length miserable thousands sighed:

“Alas, poor country;
Almost afraid to know thyself! It cannot
Be called our mother, but our grave.”

Forget not, my brethren, that even in the midst of successful war, as one of its least evils, there would almost surely exist a financial derangement far greater than that under which we now labor. Think, then, of disastrous war, with its attendant curses; recall the nations whose sins, hardly greater than ours, were visited with it, and our scourging will seem so light, as compared with the evil which might have been, that we shall break forth in words of joy: “O give thanks unto the LORD; for He is good; for His mercy endureth forever.”

The final proposition of the prophet was: “OR THAT THERE BE THREE DAYS PESTILENCE IN THE LAND?” What pestilence is, your bitter memories as citizens of this place will recall to you. What pestilence is, our whole nation has in some measure felt. This generation has seen no day of humiliation appointed in our land in view of the ravages of famine or of war, but it has been but a few years since the prevalence of pestilence occasioned the

setting apart of a day of national fasting and prayer. Have you forgotten that year of desolation? How mysteriously the pestilence glided over the deep. No ear could hear its breathing, no eye discern its footprint, when it first touched our shore. Inaudible itself, it was yet traced by the wail of human grief that followed all its movements; invisible, it was yet marked by the death which wantoned among the forms touched by its hand.

Look into that city, singled out, in the purposes of God, for desolation, but still unsuspecting of its impending fate. It knows, indeed, that the stroke has fallen here and there, yet it flatters itself that the health which prevails in its own midst will remain unbroken. Doubtful cases, and dubious rumors, confident statements, confidently contradicted, and then revived again, excite in the bosoms of the timid an apprehension which the more sanguine attempt to dispel with ridicule, until some case too distinct and appalling to be mistaken, sends through every heart the pulse of common agony, the shudder that attends the absolute certainty that the form of terror is in their midst. Many fly at once from the calls of duty and humanity; but the few who will not leave, and the thousands who cannot, mark the plague first slowly, then swiftly advancing to its height. It forms the channel for a torrent of death, into which all other diseases, however mild they are wont to be, now pour themselves. Without the stroke of its hand, it kills by the mere terror of its uplifting. The family which once knew not a pain for which their mutual love did not furnish a balm, still gather in the evening, but the sunshine of the home, the beautiful and blessed light which fades not with the day, is gone

from every brow. The soft twilight in which they loved to linger, seems to them now as the shadow cast by the sombre mountains upon the lonely valley of death. Yet the entrance of the light brings no relief of the gloom, for by that light they look furtively upon each other, to see if no paleness, nor change, gives evidence that the Destroyer has come. When, unhappy in waking thoughts, yet lingering because they know that the couch will yield them but a broken repose, they at last retire, the "Good-night" trembles on their lips, as they think that they may never hear or speak it again. The dread is realized—Oh, how soon! The groan, the shriek of pain, breaks upon the stillness of the night—they hurry with wildly beating hearts to the room where a father, a mother, a brother, a sister, is moving in convulsive struggles—before the dawn the light of the dwelling is extinguished. Everywhere Death riots: the infant lies dying upon the cold bosom of the dead mother; youth, in the very flush of health and glory of hope, is smitten down; the gray hairs which soon by the gentle process of nature must have been laid to rest, are crushed into the tomb; no soft hands smooth the silvery locks, for the hands which once touched them so gently and lovingly are mouldering in the grave. The physician sees with bleeding heart that the skill whose happy issue a grateful community had so often blessed, is now powerless, yet faithful to the last, sinks and dies by the couch of the dying. The devoted minister of CHRIST, from the services of the almost deserted temple, passes to the bedside of the sick, and the home of the sorrowing. But in the midst of his toils and prayers, the few of his scattered people who can yet be

gathered, are called to follow their pastor to the tomb. At length, there are no mourners, in reverent silence, to follow the dead. Rude hands hurry the body into the shapeless coffin, and rather cast than lay it in the shallow, scarce-finished grave. The melancholy bells cease to toll, and their sad knell is followed by a more ominous silence. In the dull light which struggles through the curtains of the sick room, or flashes up fitfully from the smouldering piles which still are kindled in the vain hope that they may help to dispel the contagion, the dead-cart flickers at midnight along the deserted streets. As it rumbles and jolts upon the stones, and coffin grinds and clashes against coffin, or, as it stops at short intervals to swell its dire burden, the lone and loving watchers, with hearts breaking in agony and suspense, listen to the dreary sounds, until the suspended breath escapes in the deep-drawn sigh, at which they start as though it were not their own, as though the stealthy footstep of the angel of death were at their side, and his dark wing unfolding itself over them. The swiftness of corruption forces the living to hurry the dead from their sight, and fearful stories are whispered, of those who seemed to be dead, but who came to consciousness, only to struggle in vain to escape from the shroud and the stifling grave. Demons, in the form of men and women, plunder the living and the dead, and carry their booty to the places of drunkenness, gambling and licentiousness, and reeking with unspeakable crimes, die in the very haunts of vice, with curses on their lips. And though from the homes where God is yet the refuge of the stricken, the agonizing voice of supplication mingled with weeping, ascends day and night, the heavens are closed, and the vials

of wrath are poured out still. Enough! The soul grows sick of these images. Well might David, when he saw what pestilence was, break forth in a piteous cry for the mercy of God upon his people: "These sheep, what have they done!" And should not we, this day, feel that the protection of our land and of our homes from pestilence, is enough, were it our only blessing, to make us forget all our little cares, those troubles which, despite our complaints, are so trifling that the mere thought of these great griefs of famine, war and pestilence, utterly absorbs them?

But if we can give hearty thanks in simply contemplating the lightness of our suffering, how must our gladness soar up, when we think of the untouched mercies which still surround us as a nation. Ours are all the glorious memories and assurances which the past can furnish; ours are all blessings, more than we could ask or think, of the present; ours are the visions of a future whose grandeur surpasses the wildest splendors of romance. The times past, and present, and yet to be, are rich in suggestions of praise. With throbbing heart, we can look back upon a history crowded with glory, though the ashes of the mighty actors in it are scarcely cold in their graves. With a grateful joy, we can look upon the present, rich in the elements of a prosperity which, if our nation's heart, weaned from its vanity, turn humbly and trustfully to God in the hour of chastisement, no crisis can long arrest. Soon, then, shall the sounds of an unwearied industry again be ringing from every city and hamlet; the arts which give comfort and grace to human existence, shall move with a step accelerated by the brief pause; and still shall the sails of our vessels flash like gleams of

moonlight on the waves of every portion of our globe. Resting on God, our prosperity shall be abiding. We shall be blessed, long as these giant ranges of mountains, piled up as memorials of the covenant of peace, shall stand; long as the Atlantic and Pacific, like twin sisters, shall stretch their arms lovingly around their new-born brother, our infant land. Resting on God, we shall be the bearer of blessings to others. As these noble rivers which sweep by our city, bear to the Ohio, from north and south, traces of the soils through which they wind, and the Ohio bears those traces to the Mississippi, and the Mississippi to the sea, so shall the swift streams of living thought, which spring from every part of our land, grow strong by blending, and bear their tinges to the ever-heaving heart of the world.* And as the breezes which play over the bloom of her fields and forests, move out from the shore to gladden the souls of men upon the deep, so shall each wind of heaven bear the fragrance of the sweet wild-flowers of her freedom, to revive the heart-sick and languishing of earth. Resting on JEHOVAH, her union shall make blessed unity. The mighty chain, of one religion, one government, one fearless, resistless, onward spirit, shall bind the free dwellers on our soil, from the rocky cliffs of Oregon,

* —“that ancient Voice, which streams can hear,

Thus speaks—

‘As thou these ashes, little Brook, wilt bear

Into the Avon, Avon to the tide

Of Severn, Severn to the narrow seas,

Into main Ocean they, this deed

An emblem yields—

How the doctrine, . . . sanctified

By truth, shall spread, throughout the world dispersed.’”

WORDSWORTH’S (versification of Fuller’s famous thought on the casting of Wicliffe’s ashes into the Swift,) *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, Part II., xvii.

shaken with the perpetual thunder of the surf, to the glades of Florida, on whose wilderness of beauty the light of an almost tropical sun loves to linger. We shall see forever unbroken, the rounding constellation which brings side by side the star of Maine, the energy of whose hardy sons builds wealth upon a reluctant soil, and the star of our new land of promise, whose "earth is turned up as it were fire, and which hath dust of gold." Forever shall that land be the guardian of the graves of the immortal dead who helped to make her glorious; she shall not be rent; never shall those sacred ashes sleep in some bleeding fragment of their once happy and united country. God of our fathers, never! While we rest on Thee, thou wilt neither permit this people to be sundered, nor suffer the overthrow of the rights dearest to man to be the price of their union. No; while our trust is in the living God, we are sure that the clouds which hang over our fair land are wreathing themselves about a future too dazzling for the unshaded gaze; when our resources shall have been developed in their incalculable and inexhaustible vastness; when millions, gathered from oppression, shall fill our waste places, and with resistless energy shall unite with our own sons in giving pre-eminence to our arts, our literature, our agriculture, our commerce; when grown to the stature of that great spirit who led our armies, we shall rise among nations to the moral grandeur with which he stood among men; when our principles of civil and religious liberty shall have triumphed everywhere, and the whole world shall, by acclamation, salute us, not as the Sister Republic, but as the Mother Republic, the freest, the holiest, the greatest of States. Then our Chris-

tianity, redeemed from sectarianism, and purified from formalism, shall breathe the fullness of her spirit into our freedom, which is her child, and never shall the mother and the daughter go forth save side by side, making earth heavenly with the touch of their hallowed feet. O, my country! I salute thee with reverence; I stand in awe before the image of the greatness which JEHOVAH offers thee. Thou art "Time's noblest offspring;" yet, if thou walkest humbly before thy God, thou shalt see the birth of an era lovelier than thyself, fairer than painter's touch or poet's dream—an era before whose sunbright consummations the starry glories of all the past shall fade away. Hail to thee! Serve God, and prosper. Then, "instead of thy fathers, shall be thy children, whom thou mayest make princes in all the earth; JEHOVAH shall make thy name to be remembered in all generations; the people shall praise thee forever;" and whatever be the greatness of thy greatest sons, they can make no loftier earthly boast, than when they say, We, too, are children of this MOTHER OF MEN.

For all this, and for more than tongue can utter, we come this day, O King of Nations! to present our thanksgivings, as peace-offerings at the Altar on the Threshing-floor. Hardly with him who harped Thy praise of old can our Land say: The LORD hath chastened me sore; but with him she can joyously cry: He hath not given me over unto death; with him she can shout exultingly: Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go into them, and I will praise the LORD.

